

P-ISSN: 2338-8617

E-ISSN: 2443-2067

Jurnal Ilmiah

PEURADEUN

Vol. 13, No. 3, September 2025



JIP

The Indonesian Journal of the Social Sciences
www.journal.scadindependent.org
DOI Prefix Number: 10.26811

INDEX COPERNICUS
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**Peace-Oriented *Dakwah* and Peacebuilding: A Critical Discourse
Analysis in Conflict-Affected Middle East Societies**

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Article in Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun

Available at : <https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun/article/view/2057>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i3.2057>

How to Cite this Article

APA : Hamid, A., Firdaus, M., Uyuni, B., & Farooq, H.S. (2025). Peace-Oriented *Dakwah* and Peacebuilding: A Critical Discourse Analysis in Conflict-Affected Middle East Societies. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 13(3), 2043-2072. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i3.2057>

Others Visit : <https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun>

Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun (JIP), *the Indonesian Journal of the Social Sciences*, is a leading peer-reviewed and open-access journal, which publishes scholarly works, and specializes in the Social Sciences that emphasize contemporary Asian issues with interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. JIP is published by SCAD Independent and published 3 times a year (January, May, and September) with p-ISSN: 2338-8617 and e-ISSN: 2443-2067. JIP has become a CrossRef member. Therefore, all articles published will have a unique DOI number. JIP has been accredited Rank 1 (Sinta 1) by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the Republic of Indonesia, through the Decree of the Director-General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology No. 72/E/KPT/2024, dated April 1, 2024. This accreditation is valid until the May 2027 edition.

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JIP indexed/included in Web of Science, Scopus, Sinta, MAS, Index Copernicus International, Erih Plus, Garuda, Moraref, Scilit, Sherpa/Romeo, Google Scholar, OAJI, PKP, Index, Crossref, BASE, ROAD, GIF, Advanced Science Index, JournalTOCs, ISI, SIS, ESJI, SSRN, ResearchGate, Mendeley and [others](#).



PEACE-ORIENTED DAKWAH AND PEACEBUILDING: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED MIDDLE EAST SOCIETIES

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Received: October 21, 2024	Accepted: September 4, 2025	Published: September 30, 2025
Article Url: https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun/article/view/2057		

Abstract

Prolonged conflicts in the Middle East have created an urgent need for culturally-grounded peacebuilding strategies, within which Islamic preaching (dakwah) emerges as a potential medium for fostering reconciliation – though its discursive mechanisms remain understudied. This study investigates how dakwah constructs peace-oriented discourse in conflict-affected societies, including Palestine, Syria, and Iraq, by examining its linguistic, narrative, and ideological dimensions. Employing a qualitative critical case study design and Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we analyzed over sixty sermons, digital content, and interviews with preachers and peace actors from 2021 to 2024. The findings reveal that dakwah actively constructs counter-narratives of justice, compassion, and reconciliation; employs rhetorical strategies such as inclusive pronouns, healing metaphors, and jihad reinterpretation to reframe conflict and promote social cohesion; and positions religious actors as cultural mediators who utilize both sermons and digital platforms to disseminate peace messages. The study concludes that dakwah serves as a transformative form of communication capable of challenging hegemonic conflict narratives. It further proposes a novel CDA-Based Peace Dakwah Framework, offering scholars and practitioners an interdisciplinary tool for peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and Islamic communication studies. This replicable model highlights the potential of religious discourse as soft power in global peacebuilding efforts.

Keywords: *Islamic Preaching; Peace Discourse; Middle East Conflict; Strategic Communication.*



A. Introduction

The Middle East remains one of the most conflict-ridden regions in the world, marked by protracted disputes that have caused immense human suffering and destabilized global security. Enduring conflicts such as the Israel–Palestine struggle, the Syrian civil war, and sectarian violence in Iraq have created environments of chronic instability, mass displacement, and economic collapse (LeMasters, 2018). These conflicts have generated ripple effects well beyond the region, contributing to refugee crises, international terrorism, and geopolitical rivalries that destabilize international order. Scholars and practitioners alike increasingly agree that military and political solutions alone are insufficient; rather, sustainable peace requires approaches that are culturally embedded, socially legitimate, and contextually adaptive (Bayar & Gavriletea, 2018; Sommer & Fassbender, 2024).

Within this challenging context, Islamic preaching (*dakwah*), traditionally understood as spiritual and moral guidance, has emerged as a potentially transformative instrument for peacebuilding. As a communicative practice deeply rooted in local culture and religion, *dakwah* can shape moral imagination, redefine communal identities, and foster reconciliation. Religious leaders in the Middle East hold significant moral authority, and their messages often resonate more strongly within communities than the rhetoric of political elites. If strategically framed, *dakwah* can provide tolerance, justice, and reconciliation narratives that counteract violent ideologies and sectarian divisions (Selamat, 2023). Moreover, *dakwah* is increasingly disseminated through digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram, extending its reach and amplifying its role in shaping collective consciousness in conflict zones. This dual presence—both traditional and digital—underscores the growing importance of religious discourse in peacebuilding strategies.

Despite this potential, existing scholarship on Islamic peace communication has notable limitations. Many studies remain normative, focusing on theological ideals of peace, or descriptive, examining specific events without unpacking the underlying discursive mechanisms (Muthmainnah, 2014; Sobirin, 2018). For example, works on interfaith dialogue or moderate

Islam emphasize broad principles of tolerance but rarely investigate how language, metaphors, or rhetorical devices in *dakwah* actively construct peace-oriented narratives (Fitriani et al., 2020; Ware, 2023). Similarly, studies analyzing religious actors in the Middle East often focus on political mobilization or sectarian conflict, neglecting the constructive use of discourse in transforming hostile relationships (Krause, Svensson, & Larsson, 2019). This leaves a significant research gap: little is known about how *dakwah*, as discourse, operates simultaneously at the micro-level of linguistic strategies, the meso-level of shared narratives and cognition, and the macro-level of ideological framing to promote reconciliation and nonviolence.

The neglect of this discursive dimension is particularly striking when viewed through the lens of conflict-affected societies. In such settings, words are not merely symbolic; they function as tools of identity construction, boundary marking, and ideological legitimation (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Violent groups have long understood the power of discourse, as illustrated by extremist propaganda that frames conflict as divinely mandated struggle (Mamdud, 2018). Yet comparatively less attention has been given to how religious discourse can be reframed to promote positive peace. Galtung's (2013) concept of positive peace highlights the necessity of not only eliminating direct violence but also addressing structural inequalities and fostering justice, compassion, and reconciliation. This theoretical lens, when combined with Van Dijk's (2017) socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), offers a robust framework to analyze how *dakwah* messages construct alternative realities that challenge dominant narratives of violence and sectarianism.

By applying CDA, this study seeks to uncover the textual, cognitive, and ideological strategies through which *dakwah* constructs peace-oriented discourses in the Middle East. CDA has proven effective in deconstructing power-laden discourses across various fields (Van Dijk, 2006; Wodak & Meyer, 2015), yet it has rarely been systematically applied to Islamic preaching in conflict settings. Previous research employing discourse analysis has focused on issues such as Salafi *dakwah* media contests (Sunarwoto, 2016) or the framing of Islam in Western think tanks (Al-Juboori & Mustafa, 2022), but the potential

of *dakwah* to construct peace discourses remains understudied. By integrating Galtung's positive peace and Van Dijk's CDA, this study provides both theoretical and methodological innovation, bridging Islamic communication, peace studies, and critical linguistics.

Another critical dimension is the role of digital platforms in amplifying and shaping *dakwah* messages. In conflict contexts where physical gatherings may be restricted or surveilled, online platforms offer new avenues for disseminating peace-oriented narratives. Studies have shown that hashtags, videos, and short messages can mobilize solidarity and reshape identity boundaries (Budnik et al., 2019; Briandana et al., 2020). However, digital *dakwah* also faces challenges: extremist actors exploit the same platforms to spread sectarian propaganda and mobilize violence (Mamdud, 2018). This duality underscores the need to analyze not only the content of *dakwah* but also its multimodal dissemination through sermons, videos, and online campaigns. In this regard, the present study fills another research gap by incorporating digital discourse into the analysis of peace-oriented preaching.

The academic contribution of this study is twofold. First, it enriches literature on Islamic communication and peacebuilding by systematically analyzing how *dakwah* operates at multiple levels of discourse in conflict zones. By doing so, it moves beyond normative appeals and descriptive accounts, offering empirical evidence of the rhetorical and ideological mechanisms that make *dakwah* a potential tool for peace. Second, it proposes the CDA-Based Peace *Dakwah* Framework, an interdisciplinary model that integrates textual strategies, social cognition, and ideological framing with the normative goals of Islamic preaching. This framework advances scholarly debates and offers a replicable tool for further research on religious communication in conflict and post-conflict societies (Van Dijk, 2017; Galtung & Fischer, 2013).

The practical significance of this study lies in its applicability for policymakers, NGOs, and religious leaders who seek to design communication strategies for peacebuilding. By identifying concrete discursive strategies—such as inclusive pronouns, metaphors of healing, and reinterpretations of *jihad* as moral struggle—this study provides actionable insights for developing

dakwah programs that reduce polarization and promote reconciliation. Furthermore, analyzing how digital platforms can amplify peace narratives highlights the need for integrating online and offline religious communication into comprehensive peace strategies (Elsayed, 2012; Don et al., 2012; Nurdin et al., 2023). These insights are relevant for the Middle East and transferable to other regions facing interreligious or interethnic conflict, such as Southeast Asia (Rasyid et al., 2023; Mulia et al., 2024).

In light of these considerations, this study investigates how *dakwah* in conflict-affected societies such as Palestine, Syria, and Iraq constructs peace-oriented discourses across micro, meso, and macro levels of language and ideology. It also examines the role of digital platforms and community initiatives in amplifying and facilitating the reception of these messages. By doing so, the study contributes to both theory and practice: it advances scholarly understanding of Islamic communication in conflict zones while providing practical guidance for religious and civil society actors engaged in peacebuilding. Theoretically, it integrates Johan Galtung's concept of positive peace with Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, enabling a systematic deconstruction of linguistic, cognitive, and ideological dimensions of *dakwah*. Practically, it offers a CDA-Based Peace *Dakwah* Framework that can be employed to monitor, design, and evaluate communication strategies in conflict settings. Ultimately, this study repositions *dakwah* as a spiritual practice and a strategic communicative tool that holds significant promise for fostering justice, reconciliation, and sustainable peace in the Middle East and beyond.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative design with Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main methodological approach. CDA was chosen for its ability to reveal the relationship between text, cognition, and ideology, which is particularly relevant for examining religious discourse in conflict-affected societies. It enables deconstructing power-laden narratives and demonstrates how language constructs alternative realities that

promote reconciliation (Van Dijk, 2006; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). In this research, CDA is applied to analyze how *dakwah* in Palestine, Syria, and Iraq produces peace-oriented discourses through interconnected linguistic, social, and ideological levels.

The data were drawn from three sources: sermons delivered in mosques, digital *dakwah* distributed via platforms like YouTube, Telegram, and Facebook, and semi-structured interviews with religious leaders, preachers, and community actors. These sources were purposively selected to capture a broad representation of peace-oriented preaching across traditional and digital spheres. Sermons were collected from mosques in Gaza, Aleppo, and Baghdad, contexts chosen for their centrality in ongoing conflict. Digital *dakwah* was sampled using relevant keywords (*sulh*, *rahmah*, *'adl*) and hashtags like #PeaceThroughFaith and #JusticeForAll. Interviewees were identified through snowball sampling, beginning with mosque councils and expanding to youth leaders and *da'i* engaged in community peace initiatives. This triangulation of sermons, online texts, and interviews was designed to ensure validity and enrich contextual understanding.

Data collection followed three steps. First, sermons and digital texts were transcribed and organized into a dataset, focusing on Sunni and Shia traditions. Second, digital discourse was archived by retrieving posts, videos, and hashtags explicitly related to peace. Third, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, lasting 45–90 minutes each. All interviews were recorded with participant consent, transcribed, and anonymized. The combination of these sources provided a multilayered perspective on how peace-oriented *dakwah* is produced, disseminated, and received.

Data were analyzed using Van Dijk's three-dimensional CDA framework. At the micro-level, attention was given to linguistic devices such as inclusive pronouns (*nahnu* – “we”), metaphors of light and healing, and contrastive declaratives redefining peace as justice rather than silence. At the meso-level, the analysis focused on collective narratives, shared suffering, and reframing figures such as Imam Husayn as universal symbols of justice. At the macro-level, the analysis traced ideological reframings that shifted sectarian binaries

like “Sunni versus Shia” into moral dichotomies of “justice versus oppression”. These levels were treated as interconnected, showing how textual strategies are cognitively processed and socially reproduced. Coding was conducted iteratively, with recurring patterns, metaphors, and frames systematically identified, while interviews provided contextual validation of textual findings.

The study also considered the multimodal nature of digital *dakwah*. In addition to texts, images, videos, and hashtags were analyzed as communicative resources that reinforce peace messages. For instance, Quranic verses juxtaposed with images of war-affected children were examined as strategies of emotional appeal that strengthen the ethical imperative of peace. These multimodal elements were coded alongside texts to capture the integrated character of online discourse.

This methodological design combines qualitative depth with analytical rigor, applying CDA to a triangulated sermons, digital discourse, and interviews dataset. By examining micro, meso, and macro dimensions, the study uncovers how linguistic strategies, collective cognition, and ideological reframing interact to construct peace-oriented *dakwah*. The integration of digital and traditional preaching ensures that the analysis reflects contemporary realities of Islamic communication, positioning *dakwah* as both a theological practice and a strategic tool for fostering reconciliation in conflict-ridden societies.

Ethical principles guided every stage of the research. Participants gave informed consent, and anonymity was maintained throughout. Sensitive or potentially harmful information was excluded to protect communities. Cultural and religious sensitivities were respected to ensure interpretations remained faithful to context while enabling critical engagement with broader social implications.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents the study’s findings, focusing on how *dakwah* shapes peace-oriented messages in conflict-affected areas of Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. The analysis is based on interviews with religious leaders and activists, along with *dakwah* documents, including sermons and social media

content. The section also explores how digital platforms contribute to spreading these peace messages.

1. Results

a. *Micro-level discursive patterns*

At the micro-level, *dakwah* texts revealed several rhetorical strategies reinforcing peace-oriented messages by reconfiguring language typically associated with division into discourses of unity and reconciliation. A key strategy was the reframing of *binary opposition* into inclusive unity. Rather than constructing “us” versus “them” as sectarian categories, preachers emphasized common humanity and divine creation. One text stated: “*We are not enemies; we are all children of the same creator*”. This rhetorical device effectively transformed potential antagonism into a shared moral identity, thus advancing reconciliation.

Another prominent pattern was the *inclusive appeal to former adversaries*. Religious leaders emphasized tolerance and mutual understanding through messages such as: “*Let us stand together as brothers, regardless of our past*”. Such appeals positioned reconciliation not as forgetting past conflict but as reinterpreting it in light of shared moral obligations.

Metaphors also carried significant weight. One common metaphor framed suffering as a test of faith, urging resilience and nonviolence: “*Through suffering, we gain strength to endure, not to retaliate*”. This metaphorical framing helped communities reinterpret their hardships not as calls to vengeance but as opportunities for moral fortitude.

Finally, a recurring strategy was the *rejection of violent jihad* as a legitimate response to conflict. Instead, *jihad* was reframed as a moral and personal struggle: “*Jihad is a personal struggle for peace, not a call to arms*”. By redefining *jihad* in nonviolent terms, preachers challenged extremist appropriations of religious language and redirected it toward moral unity and peacebuilding. These rhetorical strategies, when examined together, illustrate how micro-level discourse reshaped conflict-oriented vocabulary into peace-oriented meanings. The summary of these strategies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Rhetorical strategies used in dakwah texts

Rhetorical Strategy	Peace-Oriented Value	Example from Dakwah Text
Binary Opposition (us vs. them)	Unity, Reconciliation	"We are not enemies; we are all children of the same creator".
Inclusive Appeal to Former Adversaries	Tolerance, Understanding	"Let us stand together as brothers, regardless of our past".
Metaphor (Suffering as Test of Faith)	Resilience, Nonviolence	"Through suffering, we gain strength to endure, not to retaliate".
Rejection of Violent Jihad	Nonviolence, Moral Unity	"Jihad is a personal struggle for peace, not a call to arms".

Overall, the micro-level analysis demonstrates that preachers and religious communicators in Palestine, Syria, and Iraq strategically reworked familiar religious concepts into inclusive, peace-oriented discourse. By reframing binary opposition, extending appeals to former adversaries, employing metaphors of suffering, and redefining *jihad*, these texts undermined sectarian rhetoric and constructed reconciliation as a religiously mandated moral duty.

b. Meso-level narratives and social cognition

At the meso-level, *dakwah* texts moved beyond individual rhetorical strategies to construct broader narratives of shared suffering, resilience, and moral responsibility. These narratives reshaped social cognition by inviting communities to reinterpret their collective experiences through a peace-oriented lens.

One recurring theme was the reframing of communal suffering into a unifying force. Preachers emphasized that hardship and loss were not reasons for revenge but opportunities to build solidarity across sectarian lines. For instance, in sermons delivered in Baghdad, Imam Husayn was invoked not as a divisive sectarian figure but as a universal symbol of resistance against tyranny. By presenting Husayn's struggle as a shared heritage of justice, preachers fostered collective identity among Sunni and Shia audiences alike.

Another key pattern was the use of religious memory to bridge divisions. Historical narratives and sacred figures were reconstructed to promote intergroup solidarity rather than sectarian victimhood. Through

such reinterpretations, preachers positioned reconciliation as part of a larger religious duty, not a betrayal of one's sectarian past.

Digital *dakwah* also amplified these meso-level narratives. Campaigns on Facebook and Telegram frequently circulated hashtags such as #PeaceThroughFaith and #JusticeForAll, combining Qur'anic verses with images of war-affected children. A widely shared post, for example, paired Qur'an 49:10 (*"The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers"*) with an image of displaced families in Aleppo, illustrating how religious texts and digital media worked together to frame reconciliation as both divine mandate and moral necessity.

Interview data confirmed how these narratives shaped social cognition. A youth leader from Aleppo observed: *"When the sermon tells us our pain is shared, it becomes easier to imagine unity. The story of our suffering is shared, and so must be the healing"* (Interview, Aleppo, 2023). The main themes and their discursive functions are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Peace-oriented themes at the meso-level of *dakwah*

Narrative Theme	Peace-Oriented Value	Example from <i>Dakwah</i> Text
Shared Suffering and Resilience	Collective Identity, Solidarity	<i>"Our tears are the same, our wounds are shared; together we endure, together we heal"</i> .
Reframing Historical Figures	Justice, Unity	<i>"Husayn's sacrifice is for all who resist tyranny, not for one sect alone"</i> .
Religious Memory as Reconciliation	Brotherhood, Tolerance	<i>"Let history not divide us; let it teach us the duty of reconciliation"</i> .
Digital Narratives and Hashtags	Compassion, Peace	#PeaceThroughFaith, #JusticeForAll with Qur'an 49:10

Overall, meso-level discourse in *dakwah* demonstrates how narratives of suffering, historical reinterpretation, and digital activism collectively fostered a sense of shared identity across sectarian divides. By transforming individual grievances into collective moral duties, these narratives reshaped social cognition and created discursive space for reconciliation and resilience. This process was not merely rhetorical but functioned as a form of social healing, where the act of remembering trauma became a bridge toward unity.

Through *dakwah*, historical episodes of martyrdom, such as the tragedy of Karbala, were reframed as universal symbols of resistance and moral courage, resonating with broader audiences regardless of sectarian affiliation. In this way, *dakwah* became an epistemic tool that facilitated cross-sectarian empathy, allowing communities to reinterpret past divisions as opportunities for future solidarity. The integration of digital platforms further amplified these messages, enabling preachers and activists to mobilize trans local support and generate a participatory culture around peace-building narratives. As such, meso-level religious discourse emerges not only as a reflection of spiritual values but also as a transformative medium for civic and collective consciousness in conflict-affected societies.

c. Macro-level ideological framing

At the macro-level, *dakwah* texts shifted discourse away from narrow sectarian divides and redefined conflict in broader ideological terms. Instead of framing strife as Sunni versus Shia, preachers consistently constructed it as a struggle between justice and oppression, dignity and humiliation. This strategic discursive shift sought to unify communities around shared moral values, moving beyond theological rigidity and toward collective ethical responsibility. By emphasizing the universality of dignity and justice, preachers offered a powerful counternarrative to sectarian fragmentation, allowing *dakwah* to serve as both a spiritual and socio-political instrument in conflict mediation.

For example, a sermon in Aleppo declared: “*Our struggle is not Sunni against Shia, but dignity against humiliation, justice against tyranny*” (Sermon, Aleppo, 2022). Similarly, in Gaza, an imam stressed: “*True peace is not silence under oppression but dignity without hatred*” (Friday sermon, Gaza, 2023). These statements illustrate how religious leaders used emotionally resonant language to elevate the discourse from doctrinal debates to a universal ethic of human rights. Digital *dakwah* reinforced this orientation with slogans such as “*Justice without vengeance, reconciliation without surrender*”, widely circulated on Facebook and Telegram. These messages,



often accompanied by imagery of interfaith solidarity or shared suffering, were instrumental in cultivating broader public engagement and solidarity, especially among younger audiences active on social media platforms.

Interviews also supported this ideological reframing. An imam in Baghdad explained: *"If we say the problem is sectarian, people fight. But if we say the problem is oppression, people unite. Dakwah must guide us to that understanding"* (Interview, Baghdad, 2023). His remarks reflect a growing awareness among religious leaders of the power of framing in shaping communal responses to conflict. Rather than reinforcing sectarian identity, the emphasis on oppression and dignity opened space for empathy, solidarity, and collective moral action. These ideological reframing's, echoed across sermons, digital campaigns, and interviews, form the foundation of an emerging peace-oriented narrative within the broader *dakwah* discourse. The recurring ideological frames are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Macro-level ideological framings in *dakwah*

Ideological Frame		Peace-Oriented Value		Example from <i>Dakwah</i> Text
Justice	vs.	Equality,	Human	<i>"Our struggle is not sectarian, but against the injustice that denies children a future".</i>
Oppression		Dignity		
Dignity	vs.	Respect, Reconciliation		<i>"True peace is dignity without hatred".</i>
Humiliation				
Reconciliation	vs.	Forgiveness,		<i>"Justice without vengeance, reconciliation without surrender".</i>
Revenge		Compassion		
Unity	beyond	Brotherhood,	Social	<i>"If we say the problem is oppression, people unite".</i>
Sectarian Identity		Cohesion		

Macro-level ideological framings in *dakwah* demonstrate how preachers and digital communicators resisted divisive sectarian rhetoric and constructed justice-oriented alternatives. By situating peace within the moral binaries of justice and oppression, dignity and humiliation, *dakwah* not only redefined conflict but also offered communities a theological basis for reconciliation and nonviolence.

d. Digital platforms and thematic distributions

Digital platforms played a crucial role in disseminating peace-oriented *dakwah*. Social media channels such as YouTube, Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram enabled religious leaders and community activists to expand their reach beyond the mosque and into virtual public spheres. Through these platforms, messages of justice, compassion, and reconciliation were reframed in multimodal formats – texts, videos, images, and hashtags – that appealed to diverse audiences, particularly youth.

YouTube was widely used for uploading sermon videos accompanied by visual montages of refugee camps, destroyed infrastructure, and community rebuilding initiatives. These videos combined Qur'anic recitations with powerful imagery, producing emotional resonance that reinforced the moral urgency of peace. Telegram, by contrast, became a preferred platform for distributing short texts, hashtags, and images within more closed, trust-based networks, ensuring that messages circulated quickly among targeted communities.

Facebook proved central in mobilizing broader publics, with community pages frequently sharing slogans such as “*Justice without vengeance, reconciliation without surrender*”. These digital campaigns reached local audiences and connected with global peace movements, creating transnational solidarity around themes of justice and reconciliation. Through short video clips and visual storytelling, Instagram particularly appealed to younger audiences, leveraging aesthetics and brevity to communicate inclusive religious values.

The distribution of peace-oriented themes across these platforms is summarized in Table 4, highlighting the dominant values and examples of their articulation in digital contexts.

Table 4. Distribution of peace-oriented themes across digital platforms

Theme	Platform	Peace-Oriented Value	Example from Digital Dakwah
Justice (<i>'adl</i>)	Facebook	Equality, Social Harmony	“ <i>Justice without vengeance, reconciliation without surrender</i> ”.
Compassion (<i>rahmah</i>)	Instagram	Care, Humanity	Image posts with Qur'an 16:90 paired with photos of displaced families

Theme	Platform	Peace-Oriented Value	Example from Digital Dakwah
Reconciliation (sulh)	YouTube	Forgiveness, Solidarity	Sermon videos ending with verses on brotherhood and reconciliation
Dignity (karamah)	Telegram	Respect, Moral Strength	Text messages declaring “Peace is dignity without hatred”.

As Table 4 indicates, justice and compassion emerged as dominant themes across all platforms, with reconciliation and dignity also prominently featured. Each platform carried distinctive strengths: YouTube emphasized narrative and emotion, Telegram facilitated rapid circulation within trusted groups, Facebook enabled wide-scale engagement, and Instagram captured younger audiences through visual storytelling. Overall, the thematic distribution across digital platforms demonstrates how *dakwah* extended its peace-oriented discourse beyond physical sermons into dynamic online ecosystems. By combining traditional religious authority with digital media, preachers and activists effectively broadened the scope of their message, embedding justice, compassion, and reconciliation into the digital lives of their communities.

e. Interview Insights

The interview data added further depth to the textual and digital findings by revealing how peace-oriented *dakwah* was perceived and internalized by different segments of society. Informants across Gaza, Aleppo, and Baghdad emphasized that sermons and digital campaigns carried emotional and moral weight, shaping their understanding of justice, reconciliation, and communal identity.

A female activist in Gaza reflected on the gendered dimensions of peace discourse: “When imams speak of mercy, women feel recognized, because they carry much of the burden of war. Peace becomes about dignity for families, not just politics” (Interview, Gaza, 2023). Her testimony illustrates how women interpreted peace-oriented *dakwah* as an affirmation of their social role in sustaining family and community resilience.

Generational perspectives also emerged strongly. A youth leader from Baghdad highlighted the empowering function of digital campaigns: “*Digital campaigns give us courage. When we see #JusticeForAll trending, it feels like we are not alone in our call for peace*” (Interview, Baghdad, 2023). For young people, hashtags and online slogans provided symbolic resources that strengthened their sense of belonging to broader peace movements.

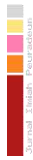
Religious leaders themselves confirmed the transformative effect of reframing sectarian divisions. An imam in Baghdad explained: “*If we say the problem is sectarian, people fight. But if we say the problem is oppression, people unite. Dakwah must guide us to that understanding*” (Interview, Baghdad, 2023). This testimony echoed the macro-level findings, showing how ideological reframing from sectarianism to justice-oriented narratives directly resonated with communities.

The interviews also indicated that peace-oriented *dakwah* was not always received uncritically. Some participants cautioned that while many preachers called for unity, others occasionally reinforced sectarian victimhood narratives. This ambivalence underscores the importance of critically evaluating *dakwah* content as both a constructive and contested discursive practice.

Taken together, the interviews confirm that *dakwah* in conflict-affected contexts was experienced not merely as religious instruction but as a communicative force that shaped collective identities, mediated trauma, and fostered resilience. Women emphasized dignity, youth stressed solidarity, and religious leaders highlighted justice—all converging on the central theme that peace must be pursued as a shared moral and social responsibility.

f. Case studies of dakwah-based peacebuilding

Beyond sermons, digital campaigns, and ideological reframing, the study identified several concrete initiatives in which peace-oriented *dakwah* was translated into practical peacebuilding efforts. These case studies demonstrate how religious discourse moved from abstract preaching into



tangible social action, linking mosque-based authority with grassroots initiatives that directly addressed community needs in conflict-affected settings.

In Gaza, mosque councils integrated Qur'anic teachings on justice with literacy and peace education programs. These initiatives combined the moral authority of religious texts with practical tools for conflict resolution. For example, literacy workshops for youth incorporated verses from the Qur'an emphasizing *'adl* (justice) and *sulh* (reconciliation), followed by interactive sessions on nonviolent communication. As a result, *dakwah* not only provided moral guidance but also contributed to equipping participants with concrete skills for resolving disputes in daily life.

In Aleppo, imams and community leaders facilitated inter-sect dialogues among youth from Sunni and Shia backgrounds. These dialogues, often held in mosque courtyards or community halls, were framed around the principle of shared suffering and resilience. Religious figures opened each session with references to figures like Imam Husayn, who was not presented as a sectarian martyr but as a symbol of universal resistance against oppression. By anchoring dialogue in shared moral narratives, these initiatives enabled participants to reconceptualize their identities beyond sectarian boundaries. Testimonies from youth indicated that such encounters not only reduced prejudice but also fostered lasting friendships across communities once divided by war.

In Baghdad, mosque councils collaborated with NGOs to launch digital campaigns promoting reconciliation. These campaigns used hashtags, online posters, and short videos to counter sectarian propaganda. Religious leaders lent their authority to the initiatives, ensuring that messages carried both spiritual legitimacy and social resonance. Partnerships with NGOs provided technical expertise in digital outreach, allowing campaigns to reach broader audiences across Iraq. Such collaborations exemplify how *dakwah*, when strategically framed, can intersect with civil society initiatives to produce innovative approaches to peace communication. The main findings from these case studies are summarized in Table 5 below.

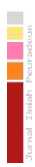
Table 5. Case studies of peace-oriented *dakwah* initiatives

Location	Initiative	Description
Gaza	Literacy and peace workshops	Integrated Qur'anic justice teachings with literacy and nonviolent communication training
Aleppo	Inter-sect youth dialogues	Facilitated dialogues between Sunni and Shia youth, anchored in shared religious narratives
Baghdad	Digital reconciliation campaigns	Mosque councils partnered with NGOs to design and disseminate online peace campaigns

These case studies highlight the diverse modalities through which *dakwah* contributed to peacebuilding. In Gaza, *dakwah* was linked to education and skill development. In Aleppo, it was operationalized as a dialogue that bridged sectarian divides. In Baghdad, it became a digital tool for countering divisive propaganda and mobilizing reconciliation. Across all contexts, *dakwah* proved to be more than symbolic preaching; it functioned as a practical, community-driven strategy for addressing the legacies of violence and fostering resilience. Together, these initiatives confirm that peace-oriented *dakwah* has the potential to operate simultaneously at the levels of discourse, community practice, and institutional collaboration. By integrating scriptural authority with social engagement, it created pathways for reconciliation that were both theologically legitimate and socially effective.

2. Discussion

This study reconceptualizes Islamic *dakwah* as a transformative form of social communication in conflict-affected societies, particularly in the Middle East, where protracted conflicts have profoundly shaped communal life. By employing Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the findings reveal that *dakwah* functions not merely as normative preaching but as a discursive practice that actively reshapes peace narratives through micro-level textual strategies, meso-level shared narratives, and macro-level ideological framings. These three layers of analysis interact dynamically, demonstrating how religious discourse can become a vehicle for soft power,



shaping collective cognition and cultural identity in ways that promote reconciliation and reduce sectarian divides.

At the micro-level, inclusive pronouns such as *nahnu* (“we”) and metaphors like “bridge” (*jisr*) and “light” (*nūr*) emerged consistently in sermons across Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. These linguistic devices dismantle sectarian binaries and cultivate a sense of shared identity (Van Dijk, 2017). For instance, preachers in Gaza invoked “we” to underscore a collective dignity tied to justice and faith, while imams in Aleppo spoke of “building hearts” as metaphors of reconciliation. Such lexical choices go beyond stylistic ornamentation; they perform ideological work by embedding inclusivity and compassion into the discourse, thereby reframing conflict as a shared challenge rather than a sectarian contest. This is consistent with Silverman’s (2024) observation that qualitative data in discourse analysis must be interpreted for its capacity to construct meaning beyond surface-level expressions.

At the meso-level, the data illustrate how narratives of shared suffering and resilience fostered collective identity. In sermons from Baghdad, *Imam Husayn* was reframed not as a symbol of sectarian division but as a universal figure of resistance against oppression, resonating across Sunni and Shia communities. This collective reframing demonstrates how social cognition is shaped through religious discourse, aligning with Halperin et al. (2011), who argue that altering group narratives about identity malleability can significantly advance peace processes. Moreover, digital campaigns on platforms like *Telegram* and *Facebook* amplified these narratives with hashtags such as #PeaceThroughFaith and #JusticeForAll, linking local religious discourse to broader digital activism (Budnik et al., 2019).

Such campaigns show that religious communication does not operate in isolation but is increasingly embedded within transnational media ecosystems, thereby broadening the reach and impact of peace-oriented narratives. This phenomenon mirrors the argument by Wahidi et al. (2025), who demonstrate how reinterpretation of Qur’anic teachings in historical contexts can produce transformative narratives of unity, especially when figures like Abdul Latif Syakur emphasized the universality of tawhid across

socio-religious divisions. Similarly, Dhulkifli (2023) underscores that the diversity of Qur'anic exegesis reflects traditions of reason that can serve as a basis for inclusive religious understanding – precisely the kind of interpretive openness that underpins these meso-level peace narratives.

At the macro-level, *dakwah* messages reframed sectarian conflict into broader ideological binaries of “oppression versus dignity” rather than “Sunni versus Shia.” For example, in *Aleppo* sermons, preachers emphasized that the true enemy is not the opposing sect but the violence that denies children a future. This reframing illustrates how *dakwah* can function as counter-hegemonic discourse, resisting state-driven or extremist narratives that instrumentalize religion for political purposes. According to Fitriani et al. (2020), social media-based *dakwah* often reveals this ideological dimension by challenging dominant discourses and providing alternative public imaginaries. Similarly, Selamat (2023) highlights that moderate Islamic actors such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* have played crucial roles in reducing conflict in the Middle East through religious moderation.

The present findings reinforce these insights by demonstrating that discursive strategies employed by preachers systematically deconstruct sectarian divisions and replace them with justice-oriented and inclusive vocabularies. This is further supported by the findings of Nurdin et al. (2023), who illustrate how traditional authority figures in Aceh play a mediatory role through inclusive interpretations of Islamic law to resolve family disputes, and by Syaikh et al. (2024), who argue for the sustainability of community values through a normative-legal lens rooted in *maqasid sharia*, which inherently supports justice, peace, and social harmony.

The findings also substantiate Johan Galtung's (2013) concept of positive peace, which emphasizes not only the absence of direct violence but also the presence of justice, structural equality, and social harmony. In the sermons and digital texts analyzed, peace is framed as *'adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *ṣulh* (reconciliation), thereby embedding structural and moral imperatives into religious discourse. For example, contrastive declaratives such as “Peace is not silence, but justice without hatred” highlight that peace cannot be reduced



to the absence of war but must involve active pursuit of equity and dignity. These rhetorical choices reflect what Moore and Jacoby (2015) call “conflict transformation”, where religious discourse reframes compromise as a moral strength rather than weakness. In this sense, *dakwah* becomes a tool for shifting perceptions of reconciliation from a sign of defeat to a manifestation of spiritual resilience and ethical commitment.

At the same time, the study acknowledges ambivalence in peace-oriented discourse. While many texts promote unity, some inadvertently reinforce sectarian victimhood or dichotomies, echoing Assaiqeli’s (2019) warning that even peace discourse carries ideological weight. This suggests that *dakwah* must be critically assessed not as a neutral practice but as embedded communication shaped by complex political, religious, and social forces. Wodak and Meyer (2015) remind us that discourse always carries traces of power relations. Therefore, peace-oriented preaching must be understood as both constructive and potentially problematic, depending on the broader ideological context in which it circulates.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of CDA in Islamic communication studies, which have often been normative and descriptive (Muhid & Samsuriyanto, 2018). By operationalizing CDA, this study provides systematic insights into how discourse reproduces cognition and power at multiple levels. The CDA-Based Peace *Dakwah* Framework proposed here integrates communicative goals, micro-level rhetorical devices, meso-level mediation, and macro-level reframing into a cohesive model. Unlike prior works that treated *dakwah* primarily as religious instruction (Aziz, 2024; Hamid, 2023), this study positions it as a form of social praxis with measurable indicators of success, such as the decline in sectarian vocabulary, the rise of unity-based hashtags, and the expansion of intergroup activities.

The practical implications are equally significant. *Dakwah*, when strategically framed, can operate as soft power (Nye, 2004), cultivating attraction and trust rather than coercion. By integrating peace-oriented *dakwah* into youth literacy programs, inter-sect dialogues, and digital campaigns, religious leaders and NGOs can reduce polarization and foster resilience. Ruslan and Irham

(2022) argue that cultural literacy and peace education are central to religious harmony, and the present study shows that *dakwah* can serve as the communicative vehicle for such values. Case studies from Baghdad, Gaza, and Aleppo also illustrate that despite limited resources and political constraints, community-based *dakwah* initiatives can significantly reduce violence and promote dialogue, consistent with Williams' (2016) call for youth-centered approaches to peacebuilding.

The global relevance of these findings is underscored by parallels in other contexts. In Mindanao, *sermon* guidelines issued by the Bangsamoro Darul Ifta' promote interfaith understanding (Muslimin, 2022; Ichwan et al., 2024). In Somalia, Al-Islah's digital initiatives disseminate inclusive Islamic ethics across clan divides (Abdi, 2021). In Afghanistan, preachers have reframed resistance discourses into resilience-building narratives (ICG, 2020). These examples confirm that peace-oriented *dakwah* is not confined to the Middle East but is transferable to diverse settings, functioning as religious soft power in fragile states. Such transferability resonates with Anwar's (2020) argument about Indonesia's contributions to peaceful change in international relations, highlighting the potential for cross-regional learning.

This synthesis leads to the development of the CDA-Based Peace *Dakwah* Framework, which integrates Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model with Islamic peace communication. The framework articulates peace as a theological imperative, employs micro-level devices such as inclusive pronouns and healing metaphors, mobilizes meso-level actors like mosque councils and youth networks, and reframes macro-level binaries into justice-oriented frames. Success indicators—including reduced sectarian language and increased intergroup activities—make the framework operational for both scholars and practitioners. As Younes (2024) argues, positive peace requires structural transformation, and the proposed framework demonstrates how religious communication can contribute to that transformation.

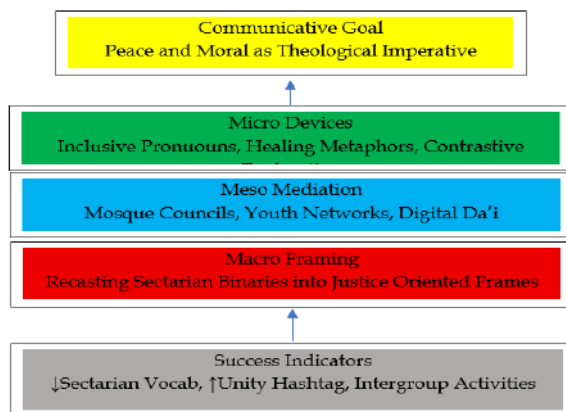


Figure 1. CDA-Based Peace Dakwah Framework

This framework not only synthesizes the findings of this study but also offers a replicable and adaptable tool for practitioners in diverse conflict settings. By identifying success indicators such as the reduction of sectarian vocabulary, the emergence of unity-oriented hashtags, and the strengthening of intergroup initiatives, it provides measurable parameters that policymakers and NGOs can employ in evaluating peace-oriented *dakwah* programs. Moreover, the framework highlights the convergence of textual, cognitive, and ideological levels of communication, reinforcing the notion that peace must be understood as both a theological imperative and a social responsibility.

Nevertheless, the study also acknowledges limitations. CDA carries inherent interpretive bias, as noted by Tracy (2010), and the reliance on digital correspondence rather than direct fieldwork may limit contextual depth. Furthermore, the geographic scope—Palestine, Syria, and Iraq—restricts generalizability. Future research should therefore broaden the empirical base through comparative studies across regions, such as Southeast Asia and Africa, and integrate multimodal analysis to include text, image, and video (Sekarwati, 2016). Another crucial direction is audience reception: how ordinary Muslims in conflict zones perceive, resist, or reinterpret peace-oriented *dakwah* compared to sectarian preaching remains underexplored. Incorporating ethnographic or survey-based methods would allow scholars to move beyond production analysis to study communicative uptake.

By highlighting these insights, this study underscores that *dakwah* in conflict zones is best understood as discursive praxis: simultaneously theological, communicative, and ideological. It affirms that religious discourse is not only about transmitting sacred knowledge but also about shaping social identities, constructing moral universes, and negotiating power relations. The proposed CDA-Based Peace *Dakwah* Framework thus contributes a replicable, adaptive model that can inform academic research, policy design, and community peacebuilding. Moreover, by situating *dakwah* within broader debates on peace, conflict resolution, and strategic communication, the study challenges conventional understandings of religious preaching and reframes it as an essential component of global peacebuilding efforts.

D. Conclusion

This study confirms that Islamic *dakwah* possesses strategic potential as a transformative communicative practice in conflict-affected Middle Eastern societies. By applying Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, the findings reveal how preachers employ inclusive language, healing metaphors, and justice-oriented framings that dismantle sectarian binaries while fostering collective identities grounded in '*adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation). These results demonstrate that *dakwah* is not merely spiritual instruction but a discourse capable of reshaping narratives and promoting reconciliation.

The main contribution of this study lies in the CDA-Based Peace *Dakwah* Framework, which synthesizes textual, cognitive, and ideological dimensions into an interdisciplinary model. While the theoretical significance of this framework enriches academic debates in communication and peace studies, its practical value provides policymakers, NGOs, and religious leaders with measurable indicators—such as the decline of sectarian vocabulary and the rise of unity-oriented narratives—to evaluate and strengthen peace-oriented *dakwah* initiatives.

Future research should expand this framework through comparative regional studies, particularly in Southeast Asia and Africa, and apply multimodal approaches that examine not only texts but also images, videos, and digital



platforms. Audience reception studies are also essential to understand how ordinary Muslims interpret and internalize peace-oriented *dakwah* messages. By pursuing these directions, scholars can deepen the applicability of the model and ensure its adaptability across diverse socio-political contexts. Ultimately, this study positions *dakwah* as a form of religious soft power and strategic communication that, when harnessed effectively, can contribute to building just, inclusive, and sustainable peace both within and beyond the Muslim world.

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